



FOREWORD

This publication is a comprehensive report on Tibet's environment and development issues, produced by the Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration. The first comprehensive report was published in 1992, and the second in 2000. This third report, *Tibet: A Human Development and Environment Report*, is the first to offer readers an insight into the well-being of both the land and people of Tibet, from environment and development perspectives, with a particular focus on human development issues. Through in-depth analysis, this report describes China's futile attempts to transform Tibet, and how its developmentalist ideology and production-oriented activities have actually given rise to a drastic inequality of wealth. The report also discusses the paradoxes involved in economic growth, the current development trends in Tibet, and the ramifications that these trends have on Tibet's environment and people.

Prior to the Chinese occupation, Tibet was ecologically stable. Covering an area of 2.5 million square kilometres, Tibet is one of the earth's most sensitive environments and a unique bio-geographical zone of our planet. Despite its cold environment, for thousands of years the Tibetan people occupied this plateau and created cultural landscapes based on the principles of simplicity and non-violence that are in harmony with the environment. Open grasslands account for 70 per cent of the landmass of Tibet and have sustained Tibetans and their pastoral herds for centuries.

Today there is expert consensus that Tibet's grasslands are degrading. China has historically remained ignorant of the dynamics of grassland ecosystems and the positive land stewardship of the nomads and farmers. China's ignorance has often resulted in misinformed and misguided policies, such as the forcible relocation of Tibetan herders, which have harmed rather than helped the restoration of the grasslands.

Mistakes were made that undermined sustainable livelihoods, but these could now be corrected. A feature of this report is its emphasis on positive, alternative approaches that will enable China to catch up with the advanced, international standards of today's world. After the invasion of Tibet, the nature-friendly livelihoods of the Tibetan people were usurped by a materialist, productivist Chinese ideology that insisted on making the fragile alpine environment produce more than is sustainable. The Chinese occupation was followed by widespread environmental destruction in Tibet, including deforestation, overgrazing, uncontrolled mining, soil erosion, widespread rangeland degradation, and landslides, the effects of which are felt far beyond its borders.

Since the economic reforms in Tibet, open exploitation of its highland plateau has been done in the name of economic development, and paraded in front of the world as benefiting the Tibetan people. In reality, all the plans and management decisions are top-down, and designed only to meet the Chinese government's vested political and military interests. These actions further entrench Chinese control over Tibetan areas by integrating Tibet into the Chinese economy as a supplier of raw materials.

China is investing huge efforts in geological exploration by mapping mineral deposits all over Tibet in order to supply its own demand for metals and hydropower. This report gives us plenty of cause to be alarmed at the pace with which Chinese migrant workers are settling in Tibet's urban centres, and at the exploitation of Tibet's mineral resources, all of which undermine the ability of the Tibetan people to hold on to their distinct cultural heritage. The Beijing-Lanzhou-Siling-Gormo-Lhasa railway, operational since July 2006, has made dramatic changes to the economics of mineral exploitation in Tibet. It has accelerated the rate of Chinese migrants coming into Tibet, thereby causing further expansion of urban areas, with a rapid increase in hotels, discos, karaoke bars, brothels and shopping malls.

Some of the most pressing issues in Tibet today are education, health, employment and the improvement of livelihoods in rural and nomadic areas. Adequate and affordable healthcare is not available to the majority of Tibetans. Systematic discrimination in the spheres of employment, health, housing, education and political representation continues to restrict Tibetan involvement and participation in the development of Tibet. China's development

policies have consistently failed to pay attention to rural areas, where the majority of Tibetans live. While the specific needs of Tibetan people may vary from region to region, all Tibetan communities are now disadvantaged. This could be corrected by learning from the successes of other poor areas in the world, where skilful investment in rural regions has, in some cases, led to remarkable results. If China is to achieve its United Nations Millennium Development Goal, which it has promised to achieve in Tibet by 2015, it must learn to catch up with the inclusive, participatory models in use around the world.

Tibet is the principal source of the rivers that flow through Asia and is referred to by China as the “Number One Water Tower”, but this water tower is now drying up: its ability to capture, hold and steadily release water for downstream users is diminishing. The snow peaks and their glaciers are all melting too fast. Tibet’s rivers are threatened by China’s plans for massive dams, hydropower and water diversion projects, which also jeopardise the lives of billions of downstream users. China’s ambitious dam and hydropower building projects are often carried out without consulting neighbouring countries or assessing the downstream impacts, which may have devastating regional and international ramifications.

This report offers a balance of alarm and hope; failures and new possibilities; unintended consequences and fresh opportunities; past damage and specific case studies of skilful new directions. The purpose is to look ahead to a future in which Tibetan voices are no longer ignored and excluded – not only for Tibet, but also for the sake of our planet, which needs the many environmental services that Tibet provides. Future provision of these precious services can only be guaranteed if development on the Tibetan Plateau is sustainable, and not exploitative. Due to its high and frigid climate, Tibet’s environment, once destroyed, will be very difficult to regenerate.

While acknowledging some of the positive developments, this report draws attention to the need for China to reconsider its current development policies, if it wants to create a harmonious society. This is crucial, particularly when China itself is making an effort to embark on the path to a sustainable future. Finally, this report proposes some alternative approaches that are best suited to the unique Tibetan Plateau, with examples of some worldwide best practices that can lead to sustainability. We hope that this publication will provide our international readers with a vivid account of the environment and human development in Tibet today, and will help to save this unique and fragile land, which is of global importance as the planet’s highest and largest plateau, and the “Roof of the World”.

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